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ABSTRACT

The teacher training program for teaching assistants (TA's) in the German department at the University of California at Berkeley is described in this paper. Problems common to both university and department are examined. The training program at the university is outlined in several areas including: (1) use of demonstration films, (2) class visits, (3) methods course, (4) micro-lesson teaching, (5) the group leader program, and (6) other features. A list of topics for discussion in the methods course concludes the report. (RL)

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ASPECTS IN TRAINING AND SUPERVISING COLLEGE TEACHERS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

by

Klaus A. Mueller

INTRODUCTION

The training of future College teachers of foreign languages has always offered challenges and posed problems. The present educational climate at the Universities and the status of foreign language studies in schools and colleges are presenting new challenges.

The situation at the Universities is not, at least not as yet, as discouraging as the plight of the majority of our public schools which prompted Charles Silberman to observe in his new book Crisis in the Classroom: "It is not possible to spend any prolonged period visiting public school classrooms without being appalled by the mutilation visible everywhere--mutilation of sponteneity, of joy in learning, of sense of self. Because adults take the schools so much for granted, they fail to appreciate what grim, joyless places most American schools are."

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The teaching in our beginning and intermediate foreign language classes continues to pose problems of considerable magnitude. I would like to highlight some of the concerns with reference to certain features

of our teacher training program in German at the University of California at Berkeley.

Foreign language teacher trainers at most Universities are confronted generally with similar problems. The history and the financial resources of the academic department and the university, as well as the qualifications and educational philosophy of the person in charge of the training program determine the variety of solutions found in attempting to cope with these problems. The differing convictions and theories regarding foreign language learning and the training of future language teachers also account for differences.

The first problem faced by the majority of training programs is the urgency at the beginning of the training program to provide sufficient guidence and support to new teachers which will enable them to carry out their duties as instructors before any substantial salutary effects of the program can be expected to be realized. At Berkeley, as at most other institutions, graduate students are receiving the major part of their training while already teaching. Moreover, most teaching assistants are also new graduate students just beginning their own studies when they are given their first teaching assignment. As a consequence, their energies and loyalties are divided by two distinct concerns: first being a new student and secondly being a new teacher.

A typical comment illustrating this dilemma was made recently by a former Teaching Assistant now involved in our new Graduate Student Teaching Improvement Program which was inaugurated last month as a

FL 002 101

pilot project by the College of Letters and Science. "TAs are insecure, as you can well imagine. They are supposed to do a job they think important, but they are not trained how to do it. They don't know what their students will be like, and they have no idea what their departments expect of them." My personal conviction is that not all TAs think that their job is important, and that not all departments fail to give TAs an idea what it expects of them. The problem nevertheless is a real one. Our teacher training program attempts to provide adequate guidance for TAs and instill them with a sense of professionalism and commitment, and at the some time improve the quality of the undergraduate language program.

DEMONSTRATION FILMS

The first aspect of the teacher training program concerns itself with providing as quickly as possible an overview of the program of instruction and an opportunity for the discussion of those phases of the course which the instructor is charged with teaching in the first quarter. We believe that the most effective means to accomplish this is to have the new Teaching Assistants view a 60 minute demonstration film showing carefully selected teaching techniques in classes taught by experienced teachers at every level of instruction, concentrating on those techniques and teaching methods which we consider most important and which we know from experience to cause problems. Some of the selected demonstrations show techniques for introducing and drilling new structures and vocabulary, procedures for student recitation of memorized material, techniques for developing fluency in speaking, reading

and writing, discussions of reading assignments, and techniques for various reviews as well as methods which have proven effective in the discussion and interpretation of literature. The film sequences present our own classes, taught by our experienced Teaching Assistants.

As the new instructor gains personal experience with his assigned class, the individual sequences of the film are shown again and discussed in greater depth during the methods course. The methods course, which is obligatory for all our new TAs, presents at a later stage additional films or demonstrations illustrating teaching situations at other institutions and in a variety of different settings.

CLASS VISITS

Another feature of our training program designed to provide TAs with early guidence are regular and scheduled class visits. The Instructor in Charge of the program--who also teaches the methods course, is the first faculty member who visits new TAs' classes early during the first quarter. Other regular faculty members of the department also visit the new TA as soon thereafter as possible. Each visitor completes a five page departmental Class Visit Report Form and schedules a conference with the TA visited as soon after the visit as convenient. In this conference the visitor's observations of the class are discussed.

The new TA inturn is required to visit a minimum of five classes during each quarter in his first year of teaching (a total of 15 classes).

He is required to complete a class visit report form for each visit. This form is similar to the form used by the regular faculty. It differs from it in a number of minor respects. The only important difference is that the name of the person visited is not reported. The purpose of the report is to help the new instructor to recognize important teaching aspects and to furnish the Instructor in Charge--to whom these reports are returned--evidence that he is aware of the various teaching aspects, as well as evidence of his judgment of the quality of the class he has observed. In addition the report serves to document that the required number of classes were actually visited.

The class visits and reports thus offer additional and regular personal contact of the new instructor with the methods teacher and other members of the faculty for purposes of discussing teaching problems. They give the teacher trainer further and much needed opportunities to judge the degree of perceptiveness and the professional development of the new colleague.

THE METHODS COURSE

The methods course extends over three quarters. This extended period of time affords the new TAs and the Instructor in Charge to maintain regular formal instruction during the important first year of teaching. Among the various features including the demonstration films and class visitation program already mentioned, the methods course incorporates two additional key activities: Micro-Lesson Teaching and the Group Leader

Program.

MICRO-LESSON TEACHING

The program of micro-lesson teaching provides the new instructor with an opportunity to teach at least one regular class for a period of 10 to 20 minutes while being observed by the other members and the instructor of the methods course. This is accomplished through a closed circuit television system which makes it possible to record the class on video-tape and simultaneously have the observors in another room viewing the performance on a TV screen. As soon as the TA teaching the micro-lesson has completed his assignment, the regular instructor takes over the class, the TA re-joins the methods class, and his performance is discussed. Then the video-tape of the micro-lesson is re-played and is again discussed by the group.

This procedure has proven to be a valuable training device because it makes the new instructor aware of problems and gives him an opportunity to see himself in action. Although many new teachers are somewhat nervous and tense while teaching a micro-lesson, the great majority of our TAs have expressed satisfaction if not always enthusiasm with this feature of our program. Most admit however that they would not otherwise have become aware of certain aspects of their teaching. All have found the opportunity to view themselves greatly revealing and the majority consider the procedure helpful. In many cases, those aspects of the teachers' performance not discussed by participants of the methods course

are most helpful to the new instructor in assisting him to find satisfactory approaches and techniques and solving personal problems connected with his teaching.

THE GROUP LEADER PROGRAM

Through the appointment of group leaders we have been able to effect better coordination and administration of our undergraduate language program. Experienced and qualified TAs are appointed to serve as group leaders for each course (one leader is appointed for German 1, another for German 2, etc.). In most cases they are promoted to the rank of Associate in recognition of this additional responsibility. In this capacity they perform a number of key functions. They assist the Instructor in Charge in the administration of courses (scheduling of group meetings, class visits, coordination of examination committees and the like). More importantly they provide a professional link between the TA and the faculty member in charge of the courses. Perhaps the most significant benefit of this arrangement is derived from giving the TAs an opportunity to discuss suggestions for improvements of our courses, changes in procedures and course content, scheduling problems, teaching difficulties, student problems and the like first among themselves. This leads to clarify their own thinking and results in a more orderly presentation of suggestions for change through the Group Leader to the Instructor in Charge leading eventually to changes approved by the department.

This program also affords some of our senior TAs a much needed opportunity to become involved in the administration and decision making process of the department which will serve them well when they themselves must eventually assume the duties of planning and supervising courses. The sudden transition from being a TA to becoming an Assistant Professor at a new institution has in the past been a rather traumatic experience for most graduate students. For this reason we consider our training in course planning, the preparation of final examinations, and some aspects of departmental administration an important part of the training of future colleagues. In the position just described they do in fact receive such training.

OTHER FEATURES

The other features of our teacher training program and methods course are perhaps more similar to programs as they are constituted in other institutions. For this reason I shall not describe these aspects in detail.

In addition to the activities described, the methods course includes a selected Reading List[1], Lesson Plans for each course, an Instructor's Guide and numerous "handouts" scheduled for use in the methods course. It might perhaps be of interest to list the topics for discussion in the methods course. These Discussion Topics are

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1. For copies of the Reading List, Lesson Plans, Instructor's Guides, Class Visit Report Forms and related documents contact the author.

scheduled after the applicable background reading from the Reading List has been accomplished.

1. Structual perception drills
2. Pronunciation drills
3. Function and use of dialogues
4. Function and use of directed dialogues
5. Dialogue recitation
6. Pattern drills
7. Application drills
8. Directed conversations
9. Free conversations
10. Recombination exercises - oral and written
11. Introduction to reading
12. Discussion of assigned reading
13. Composition
14. Introduction to literature
15. Interpretation of literary selections
16. The use of audio-visual-tactile aids
17. The use of electro-mechanical devices
18. The use of Television
19. Programmed learning
20. Individualized instruction
21. Team learning
22. Testing
23. Grading
24. Preparation of supplementary teacing materials
25. Audio-lingual vs. other instructional methods

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26. The influence of structural linguistics of language teaching
27. The influence of behavioral theories on language teaching
28. Conditioning and cognitive learning aspects
29. Psycholinguistics
30. Paralanguage and kinesics
31. General semantics
32. Research and research designs

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33. Articulation
34. Comparison of course materials
35. Professional activities, organizations, and journals
36. Questions regarding a national model German curriculum

In conclusion I wish to stress that the most important aspect in

any training of future foreign language teachers of the college level must be the development of the candidates' sense of professionalism. The most effective manner in which to achieve this goal seems to be to provide a well structured program of professional training and supervision from the very beginning of the career of the new teacher. It is of utmost importance that new teachers are able by virtue of their teaching skill to convince students that the learning of a foreign language and culture on the college level is possible and desirable. They can accomplish this only if they are being given adequate training. In the final analysis of course the success of every teacher must be judged by the performance of his students.